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SUBJECT: MEETING BETWEEN S/I AMBASSADOR SATTERFIELD AND
DEPUTY COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES SPEAKER SHEIKH ATTIYA,
JUNE 8, 2008

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a June 8 meeting with S/I Satterfield, Deputy Speaker Sheikh Khalid Attiya said that most remaining obstacles to a new election law can be resolved, but that there is no agreement on the division of seats for the Kirkuk council. Delaying the election there might be the most practical way forward. Attiya favors an open list approach, which he claims is supported by Iraqis and "most" of the ruling coalition. He declined to predict quick passage of the election law. Attiya pled for greater U.S. engagement with moderate Iraqi Shia. He criticized the Sadrists and approved the government's approach aimed at weakening them. End Summary.

Law on elections -- Kirkuk a stumbling block

¶2. (C) On June 8, S/I Satterfield met with Sheikh Khalid Attiya, Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives (CoR), at Attiyah's home. Satterfield opened by asking about prospects for the law on provincial elections. Attiya responded that most obstacles to a new law could be resolved, but that the division of seats in the Kirkuk provincial council was a true stumbling block -- a theme he returned to several times. He referred to the Turcoman proposal to divide the seats evenly among themselves, the Kurds and the Arabs. The other two groups had not agreed to this, and Attiya believed that a UNAMI proposal to postpone the election in Kirkuk might be the only practical way forward. The Kurds would welcome such a delay, but Attiya did not know whether the Turcomen and Arabs would accept one.

¶3. (C) Satterfield asked how the representation of women in provincial elections would be handled in the draft law. Attiya said the fundamental issue was not how the "quota" would be managed in an open or closed list system. It could be implemented "without difficulty" in either case. The real issue under debate in the CoR was whether in fact the fixed quota was Constitutionally mandated for provincial elections or was specified only for the national CoR election. Attiya said there was no clear majority or consensus view on this; some opponents of applying the quota at the provincial level cited the "tribal character" of local society and the difficulty in "imposing" women candidates/representatives in such circumstances.

¶4. (C) On the electoral system itself, Attiya said that he favored an open list in the provincial elections. Waxing animated, Attiya said that this was the approach "people wanted," and was the only way to restore credibility to politics - by establishing a greater bond of confidence than now existed between elector and elected official. Satterfield asked whether there was consensus within the UIA on an open list. Most of the UIA was agreed, Attiya said. On timing of the electoral law passage, Attiya doubted that the draft law would be done quickly quickly, i.e., within the next week. Other problems could be solved, but the issue of representation in Kirkuk was not near resolution.

Attiya asks for attention to moderate Shia

15. (C) Telling Satterfield he wished to "open his heart" to him, Attiya began a lengthy complaint that the Congress and people of the United States had a distorted image of the "moderate Shia majority" in Iraq (and Lebanon). Sunnis claim that Shia are extremists, but the Shia message is one of toleration and coexistence. Nor is the Sunni claim true that Iraqi (or Lebanese) Shia are loyal to Iran. The United States, he said, had an excellent official dialogue with Shia leaders in Iraq and those same leaders were repeatedly invited for meetings in the U.S. - but this was not sufficient. The U.S. had to build a deeper relationship beyond the "leaders you talk with all the time" and both reach out to a broader number of "moderate Shia" and bring them to the U.S. for dialogue both with the Congress and the American people. Satterfield commented that we agreed on the distorted image - both in the region and outside - of the Shia community in Iraq and elsewhere in Arab states. Arab perceptions of Iraq were beginning to change for the better, however, and with that change should come a better understanding of the region's Shia communities as well.

Trends within Sadrism movement

16. (C) Satterfield asked for Attiya's current assessment of the Sadrism political movement. (Note: Attiya has been a scathing critic of the Sadrism Trend - especially the conduct of its CoR members. End Note.) Attiya approved of the

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methods used by the government to restore order in Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) controlled areas, but underscored the importance of following kinetic measures with economic/humanitarian steps, especially provision of essential services and generating employment. Attiya called the Sadrism approach "immature" and said a strategy - along the lines he noted - had to be worked out to combat it and to strengthen the government.

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